

Annual General Meeting 2006

Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual General Meeting of The Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited held on Saturday, 10 June 2006 in Campbell College, Belfast, at 10.30 am.

- 1 Apologies** were received from Mr. Harry Allen (Donaghadee Historical Society), Ms. Naomi Carver (Belfast Young Archaeologists' Club), Mrs. Jennifer Cunningham (Coleraine Historical Society), Mr. Roy Hamilton (North West Archaeological & Historical Society), Mr. Paddy Fitzgerald (Centre for Migration Studies, U-AFP), Dr. Neil McGleenon (FULS Executive Committee), Ms. Belinda Mahaffy (FULS Executive Committee), Mr. Eddie O'Kane (FULS Executive Committee) and South Belfast Historical Society.
- The Minutes of the 2005 Annual General Meeting of The Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited were approved. Their adoption was proposed by Mr. J. Dooher and seconded by Ms. A. Robinson.
- 3. Honorary Secretary's Report (Ms. Ann Robinson)**

Federation Office: Unfortunately at the end of August the Federation's office in May Street was closed. The Development Officer and Administration Assistant are now working from their own homes and although some of the office equipment etc is being used by them, the remainder of the Federation property has been put in a self-storage unit in Belfast. The physical work of clearing the office was done by James Davidson, Keith Haines, Roddy Hegarty, Janet Lundy and Janet's husband, Stephen. We wish to put on record our thanks to this group for their hard work.

The Development Officer and Administration Assistant can be contacted by post, through the box number address in Carrickfergus, by phone or e-mail. The new contact details will have been forwarded to all member societies and also appear in the latest issue of *Due North*.

Meetings: During the past year there have been six meetings of the Executive Committee. Because we now do not have an office we have had to find other venues for holding all these meetings. These have taken place in Dungannon, Lisburn and Belfast. This year there were only five Executive Committee members, plus the Chairman, Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary, making a total of eight, so it has, at times, proved difficult to reach our quorum of five. In fact, at two of our Executive Committee meetings there was not a quorum. You will notice that we have had no Vice-chairman during the year.

I would like to thank all the Executive Committee members who have managed to attend meetings this year.

Development: As usual the Development Officer, Roddy Hegarty, has had an extremely busy year with a heavy workload in developing, promoting and representing the Federation. This has involved a considerable amount of travelling as it has included short courses in north, south and west Belfast, Dungannon, Carrickmacross and Corduff in Co. Monaghan, Belturbet, Strabane, Castlederg, Markethill and Newry. As well as helping to develop skills in researching local history with these groups these courses have also helped in generating income for the Federation.

Throughout the year he has also given talks and organised tours for various groups on a range of subjects. These groups have included:

The North West Archaeological and Historical Society
Age Concern in Coleraine
YMCA in Drumahoe
Coleraine Historical Society
ROSA in Newtownhamilton tour of Armagh for a group of retired teachers from both sides of the border
Markethill & District History Society
Retired Health Service Workers in Knockbracken
North Belfast History Society
Local Studies students at Queen's University Belfast,
West Belfast Historical Society
Newbuildings & District Archaeological and Historical Society
1798 tour of Belfast for Shantallow Women's History Group
Donaghmore Historical Society
Stewartstown Historical Society.

The Development Officer is also a member of the Steering Group of Celebrating The Development Local History 2006, which was launched at Clifton House, Belfast; on 31st January 2006. He also sat on the steering group of the Northern Ireland Museum Council's (NIMC) Cross Border Museums and Heritage project and contributed to two workshops as part of this programme in Monaghan and Coleraine. In addition, the Development Officer sat on the DCAL/DOE Heritage Sub Group meetings in Belfast and Enniskillen. He has also liaised with, among others, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), Community Relations Council (CRC) and sits on the Local History Panel of the Library and Information Services Council (LISC).

He was also invited to Stornaway, on the Isle of Lewis, to contribute to a conference on developing local history society joint working in the Hebrides by Sli Cholm Cille and to Tartu, in Estonia, where he delivered workshop training alongside Cavan Monaghan Rural Development to rural tourism providers on heritage and cultural tourism. The costs of both of these trips were covered by The Council of the Western Isles and by CMRD respectively.

As a result of the funding channelled through PRONI by DCAL the Development Officer also engaged in outreach work in communities of identifiable social need in North Belfast, Andersonstown, Taughmonagh, Dungannon and South Down/South Armagh. This had the secondary benefit of enabling the FULS to claim about £8,000 from this source.

Volume 2 Issue 1 of *Due North* was published in January 2006. This excellent publication would not have been possible without the considerable work of the editor, Keith Haines, Roddy and Janet. A smaller than usual number of copies were produced, but so far the magazine has sold extremely well and we hope to have another issue ready for the early Autumn.

Funding: During the year attempts have been made to get funding from various sources. The Honorary Treasurer, Keith Haines, will give more details about this.

In short, we continue to receive our main funding from the CRC. We have attempted to obtain additional funding from CRC and the Garfield Weston Trust, but were unsuccessful. We were successful in obtaining some funding from DCAL, through the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, and have secured a grant from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for specific work to be completed over the next twelve months.

Our thanks are due to Roddy, Keith and our Chairman, James Davidson, for their repeated attempts to try to obtain funding both for events and for running the Federation. This all takes a considerable amount of time and effort in form filling and meetings for what, at times, is very little, or nothing, in return.

New Members (June 2005-06): During the year we have been pleased to welcome the following societies to the Federation:

- Armagh City Folk Club
- Coshquin Oral History Group, Londonderry

Acknowledgements: This year has been a year of change, adjustment and planning for the Federation and its staff. Our thanks to the Development Officer and the Administration Assistant, Roddy and Janet, for their continued hard work for, and dedication to, the Federation. Our thanks also to the Chairman, James Davidson, and the Hon. Treasurer, Keith Haines, for all the work they have done for the Federation during the year.

The Future: During 2006/2007 the search to identify and secure future funding will continue.

An application is being made to "Awards for All" for a fairly large project planned for next year. The main thrust of this application will be to build on the work of the Development Officer this year and provide locally targeted local history workshops and presentations in areas right across the Province. The project will take the title "The Making of Modern Ulster" and will cover a range of themes from archaeology to the Plantation of Ulster and family history. At the moment this project is envisaged to run throughout the year, culminating in a seminar towards the end June 2007. All of this is dependent on obtaining funding.

The Development Officer has recently been in contact with the Mid Antrim Museums Service which plans to run a major outreach project over the next two years. This has received the backing of Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey Councils as well as funding from HLF It is hoped that the Federation can and will play a key role in developing and delivering this project, taking advantage of the skills experience and lessons built up over the last twelve months.

The Federation would welcome support for these events and any offers of help/volunteers would be most welcome. Please help promote local history. Thanks: Finally, our thanks to Campbell College for allowing us to use this venue for the AGM and to Keith Haines for conducting the tour of the College, which will take place after the AGM.'

4. **Honorary Treasurer's Report (Mr. Keith Haines)**

'Holding the 2006 AGM in what is, for me, familiar territory (i.e. Campbell College) creates an illusion of assurance. However, the reality is that the financial position of the Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited (FULS) remains precarious. One child who frequented these corridors nearly a century ago later observed, rather appositely in our circumstances: 'If [miracles] are possible but immensely improbable, then only mathematically demonstrative evidence will convince us' (C S Lewis, *Miracles*).

At times, it seems to me that we need a miracle to ensure our survival but, inevitably, we are constrained by the mathematics of Mr. Micawber: 'Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery'.

Legal requirements mean that FULS cannot trade at a loss, which results in a recurrent annual struggle to raise funds, yet the future conspires to appear ever bleaker. Our funder - the Community Relations Council (CRC) - is finding its own budget more circumscribed; as, indeed, is that of our constituency. The commitment to, and interest in, local studies by our membership - that is attendance at society meetings, visits to historical locations, the production and purchase of publications, etc. - comes out of its personal pocket. Threatened changes to the financing of local government in Northern Ireland, and the currently spiralling cost of utilities and fuel, mean that our members will have less disposable income to expend in the direction of local studies. Clearly, very challenging days lie ahead.

CRC: We remain very much reliant upon, and grateful for, the continued funding provided by the CRC towards the salaries of our two full-time employees. During the year there was a degree of concern that, as a consequence of the demands and impositions upon themselves, CRC may have further reduced our grant of £41,000 per annum. However, we were relieved that, at least for a further year, this sum has remained stable. (They also provided an additional sum which covered our 2005 auditing fee).

Nevertheless, this means that, before we can start settling any other bills consequent upon our work, we still have to raise funding for a percentage of salaries, and the stark reality facing us is that we may well have to find a different primary funding agency within the next couple of years.

Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL): I noted in last year's Annual Report that DCAL had provided a grant of £10,000 for us, as they expressed, 'to help us through [our] current difficulties'. Access to this grant was filtered through the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), and it became apparent that DCAL expected it to be utilised to the mutual benefit of both bodies. It has to be stated that - partly as a consequence of the vague protocol established by DCAL - the arrangement, however welcome, did not prove as satisfactory as might have been hoped. In the early stages of this last financial year PRONI proved to be a dilatory and somewhat inflexible custodian of this sum, and ultimately we have managed to obtain only £8,300 of the grant. (The remainder will presumably be repatriated with DCAL by PRONI).

PROM utilised the grant primarily, and quite legitimately, as a means of enabling them to deliver their objective of Targeting Social Need. However, to obtain this money, our Development Officer had effectively to become an employee of PROM, which diverted his time and energy which might have been spent more patently and productively on other projects more singularly beneficial to FULS.

Of all the government bodies, DCAL is the one Ministry which has been most closely related to the kind of work carried out by FULS. We have expressed our dissatisfaction, both via correspondence and at a meeting with their representatives, to DCAL about their lack of acknowledgement of the kind of work that we do. Their riposte is that they are a small agency, and simply do not have any funds to support the work undertaken by the Federation: they have said, as recently as 2 March 2006, that they 'can offer little comfort as regards future funding from the Department in the current stringent financial constraints. It is important therefore that [you] look to other sources of funding and perhaps charging for the services you provide might be an option worth exploring'. This latter statement is wonderfully ironic, and virtually an insult, as much of the work that our Development Officer undertakes is attending meetings and working on projects - the current *Celebrating Local History* 2006 project, which would not have seen the light of day without the input of the Development Officer, is a perfect example - with agencies financed by DCAL. Yet usually FULS is the only agency associated those projects which is not being paid for its services by DCAL!

Any further approaches that FULS may wish to make to Government bodies for more secured funding is rendered almost impracticable by the current lack of political progress in Northern Ireland, or any clear vision of its future structure.

Other funding: It has, therefore, become a time-consuming occupation with FULS to raise additional sources of funding. Recently the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation forwarded - with an apology - over £7000, which had been unaccountably delayed, for work on one of our projects. However, it has to be borne in mind that, as well as being late - which placed pressure upon our finances - it was also ring-fenced for the project work, and therefore does not greatly assist our search for general administrative funds. Nonetheless, the moment should not be passed without expressing our gratitude for the interest of the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation in our work.

An application was made to the Garfield Weston Foundation for a very modest award towards a project. This was rejected, partly under the plea that they could not support all

applications on their very limited budget: 'I am sorry to inform you that due to the heavy demands currently being made upon the Foundation's limited resources, it is regrettably not possible to offer the financial support you seek for this appeal'. The Honorary Treasurer has to express astonishment at this assertion, bearing in mind that the Weston website boasts that: 'In the year to 5 April 2005, the Foundation supported 1,862 applications with grants totalling over £38.7 million!! It is my fervent hope that, in search of greater profits, Wagon Wheels do not get any smaller. At FULS we have become accustomed to trying to maintain an optimistic outlook, and in the words of the apposite Burt Bacharach song: '[there may be] No wheels on my wagon ... things look bad, but I'm singing a happy song'!

We have one other application in progress, although this is not relevant to the accounts of 2005-2006 financial year, and will feature in next year's Annual Report

It cannot pass without mention that a good proportion of the funding for the administration and management of the Federation is raised through the workshops and seminars organised with local groups by Roddy Hegarty, the Development Officer. These involve a lot of careful planning and, as a number of these groups happen to be on the outer fringes of Ulster, a great deal of travel. Roddy deserves much praise for his resilience with these projects and, without the funding that they raise, FULS would find it difficult to continue. Office management: A substantial part of the funding of office services is paid for by Society (and individual) membership fees and the purchase of Public Liability Insurance. We feel that these are levied at a reasonable level. A number of recent applications for membership and insurance cover is indicative of the continuing need for the cheap insurance cover provided by FULS - and the reality is that, if FULS were to cease operating, many of its affiliated societies and organisations would find it difficult to continue to meet, legally, without insurance.

Much of the funding raised by the Development Officer's outreach programme also pays for the general running of the Federation's administration. The costs of maintaining an office have been dramatically reduced with the abandonment of May Street, and the fact that the two officers of FULS operate from home has not dramatically altered the smooth functioning of its work. However, the arrangement is far from satisfactory, and both of them are to be commended for the fact that they have allowed FULS's machinery and workload to impinge upon their domestic lives and space. Their dedication and loyalty has enabled the Federation to struggle through another difficult year.

The Chairman's contribution: I should also like to thank the commitment of those members of the Executive Committee who have attended meetings in particular, I should like to pay tribute to the contribution of the Chairman, James Davidson. He stepped in this time last year at the last minute when the then Chairman was unable to continue for a second year, and has made himself available whenever required. If I single out his work, it is because it has been particularly valuable from a financial perspective. As we could not afford professional removal services to vacate the May Street office, he turned out in person for three days and contributed to the arduous physical labour of clearing the office - and his contacts also provided us with remarkably cheap transport. His range of contacts is quite remarkable, and the grant which we obtained from DCAL was primarily the result of his lobbying.

I am never sure where he finds the energy for his constant travelling, but this includes regular visits to, and links with, related organisations and institutions in the Republic and, in addition to promoting the Federation at every opportunity in the south, he has popularised and sold a large number of copies of *Due North*.

Due North: I am pleased to report that *Due North* remains financially viable, although I confess that we could benefit from more advertising within its pages. We requested a smaller print run for the most recent edition (Vol. 2 Issue 1), and I am pleased to report that over two-thirds of the copies have been sold.

Conclusion: However, despite that positive note, ensuring the financial survival of FULS continues to be a demanding and stressful occupation.

Having begun this report with a comment of a former pupil of the establishment in which we are meeting, I might usefully conclude with the observations of another - William MacQuitty, who later produced the film *A Night to Remember*. Whilst the echo of 'sinking ships' may be an unfortunate metaphor in this particular circumstance, that it not the thrust of my final words. Just the opposite!

MacQuitty was a man of vision and ambition. In his final book - *Survival Kit: how to reach Ninety and make the most of it* - he recalled that: 'The boys in my Belfast school were placed as if on railway lines, and in the opinion of the teachers these would, if carefully followed, lead to termini of importance. The problem was that ... there was no time left over for actually getting off the train every now and again - not even for a brief look at the marvels that lay alongside the tracks on its route. I therefore experienced an educational system which failed to teach that ambitions for security are delusions ... In my youth ... we never expected anyone to help us ... Self-help was paramount ... To find the right path, we need to test out different kinds of work and types of challenge'.

It may be that challenging the established approaches and demonstrating an individual, creative vision is what is required by the Federation if it is to survive. Travelling along the regulation lines may bring us to the terminus before we realise it. MacQuitty hints that, in order to succeed, you need to create your own ideas and challenges. Our Development Officer, Roddy Hegarty, is a man in that mould - and he may be better served, and the Federation may well survive, if we adapt to a new way of thinking. We should be 'getting off the train' a little more often.

5. Election of Auditors

It was proposed by Mr. J. Bradley and seconded by Mrs. D. Corcoran that M.B. McGrady be reappointed as auditors.

6. Chairman's Remarks

I would like to begin by thanking everyone who has attended the AGM this Morning and to pay special thanks to those who through their commitment to the Federation have ensured that we are still around to have an AGM here in 2006. Admittedly this time twelve months ago the outlook was bleak. There was little promise of funding on the horizon and the Federation was struggling to deal with the financial deficit brought about by the reduction of the CRC grant. Some tough decisions had to be made and I hope that we will be able to move forward with at least a small degree of optimism into 2007.

My remarks fall into three broad areas. Firstly, I would like to thank Keith Haines for his unstinting commitment to the office of Treasurer. This is often regarded as a thankless position in any organisation as the holder is seemingly always the bearer of bad news. In the Federation, as we know, this could not be more true. Keith, however, has endured several years of bad news by now and I hope that for his sake and for the Federation's that the balance sheet in a year's time will not be like those of the previous few. His help in meetings with the CRC and with DCAL was much appreciated and valued.

He has as ever presented us with a challenge in that we face into the last year of our grant from CRC with an ever increasing need to grasp the nettle and to argue our own case. It is high time that the Federation realised that there are few out there prepared to do us any favours. On the one hand we have constantly been shown a glimpse of what might be only for this to be snatched away by bureaucracy or bad faith. As an organisation, on the other hand, we can be glad that we no longer are burdened by having to find more than £13,000 each year for an office which if we were to be honest was a luxury we could ill-afford.

We successfully, but with difficulty, managed to raise the money to run the office for the best part of a year. But we were employing a Development Officer to raise money only to put this straight into someone else's pocket. He was also finding it increasingly difficult to do the job he was originally employed to do - working on the ground with those interested in developing local studies in this province. Whilst his fund-raising duties have continued and whilst there are costs still in running a virtual office these will lessen as the year goes on and we should begin to see a modest increase in our revenue which will help to address, even if only in a small way the financial concerns that we still have.

Secondly, I want to address the issue of working on the ground. I also wish to express my thanks to Ann Robinson for her work this year as secretary and for her report on how the Federation has developed in the last year. It has been a very busy year for the Development Officer sometimes clocking up to sixty hours a week and countless miles on the road. Nevertheless the Federation is now reaching areas that it never before was able to. This in part is due to particular funds being made available but is also due in no small way to the fact that the burden of finance has been lifted a little by the move to home based offices for the staff. I would like to see this new found access translated into new membership over the next year with more people realising that if we work together as a Federation we can achieve much more than ever could on our own. To this end I would like to welcome those societies that have joined us during the past year.

Finally I will admit that it is always easy to look back and curse our bad fortune than it is to do something about changing that fortune in the time ahead. Therefore I feel it is my responsibility to set out some priorities for the next twelve months. Looming on the horizon is the need to apply for renewed funding from CRC as our present grant runs out in March 2007. This is not a task for October and November but for now. It is a task that will require a lot of hard work and we must ensure that we make the best possible case if we are to meet again at an AGM in a year's time. A number of the committee and the staff took part in an exercise with CRC which introduced us to new ideas about self evaluation. Those ideas have got to be harnessed and we must face up to the difficulties and responsibilities of running the organisation. CRC's commitments are as ever increasing and our case has to be made water-tight. This will require a strong commitment from all of our new committee, both new and existing committee members to ensure that we succeed.

I have already talked about our Development Officer working in areas that previously we could not or did not work. Some of this work is between communities that only a few years ago did not trust each other enough to sit in the same room. The federation is playing its part in overcoming that mistrust. Bridge building now, perhaps, is more important than ever it was. Not just between our traditional 'Two' communities but between these and newly arrived groups from elsewhere in Europe. We have the opportunity to do more of the type of work that CRC not only wants us to do but expects us to do. I want also to see greater co-operation between ourselves and the southern Federation and re kindle those links that were strong only a few years ago.

I really believe that we are at our strongest when we are enjoying what we do. My own experience of working with different groups across this island has shown me that the social part of local history is the most important. I have thoroughly enjoyed my own visits to member societies during the year and look forward to visiting others in the course of this year.

This enjoyment factor I find is what keeps many of us involved in local history and gives us an appreciation of the hard work and dedication of others. I would like to see more opportunities for our members to meet each other and just to talk and share their stories and ideas. I would like to see those who have developed skills through their involvement with the Federation to share those skills with new people just coming on board and I would especially like to call on those of you who have been shy until now and who have the sort of business skills we really need to make yourself known and to play a role in securing and developing the Federation for future years.

I will conclude by extending my thanks to Campbell College for their generosity and hospitality and maybe by inviting you all to come along next year to the AGM again, this time with a few more friends in tow. We may even meet in my old school on that occasion, which along with the other four Royal schools will be celebrating their four

hundredth anniversary in 2008. A Federation AGM in 2007 would be a great way to start those celebrations.

7. Election of Officers and Committee 2005-2006

Mr. Davidson vacated the chair and invited Mr. Hegarty to conduct the election of officers and Executive committee.

Nominations were received as follows:

- 2 for the position of Chairman; and
- 1 for the position of Vice-Chairman.

Mr. John Dooher was duly elected as Vice-Chairman of the Federation.

A vote was taken to elect a Chairman. The nominees were Mr. James Davidson the current Chairman of the Federation and Ms. Josephine Quinn of the Dunmurry Local History and Heritage Group.

The result of the vote was 25 in favour of Mr. Davidson to 5 in favour of Ms. Quinn. Mr. Davidson was duly elected Chairman of the Federation.

No new nominations were received for the position of Treasurer, therefore Mr. Keith Haines was deemed nominated.

Mrs. Margaret Cartwright of the North Belfast Historical Society, had submitted her resignation, in writing, from the Executive Committee with effect from the date of the AGM.

The following Ordinary Executive Committee Members were deemed nominated:

Eddie O'Kane Ex Officio past Chairman

Neil McGleenon Markethill Historical Society

Belinda Mahaffy Co. Donegal Historical Society

Josephine Quinn Dunmurry Local History & Heritage

Group The above persons were elected as Directors of the Federation.

8. Any Other Business

Mr. Hulme of the Carrickfergus Society informed the meeting of the proposed 4-lane motorway to be built between Navan and Dublin. The road would be built over an ancient Viking site. The Meath Historical Society were currently in the process of objecting to the building of the road and would welcome any support from societies.

Ms. Dudman suggested that the Federation look at other ways of distributing *Due North*, particularly with non-members in mind. She stated that it was difficult to know how to get copies if you were not a member of the Federation. Professor Buchanan stated that he was saddened by the amount of resistance the Federation was experiencing from DCAL in finding an alternative source of funding. He stated that he thought it was disgraceful that the Department should treat the Federation in this way and that it was extremely discouraging for staff members.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.00 noon.